

## Modern Concerns

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Summary: When the Big Four are high schoolers facing everyday concerns, how will they manage to cope? Will Merida ever be able to make peace with her mother? Will Rapunzel learn to break out of her shell? Will Hiccup be able to learn to stand up for himself and what he's passionate about? And will Jack be able to understand his own value? Rise of the Brave Tangled Dragons.

### 1. Chapter 1

AU.

I don't own Brave, How to Train Your Dragon, Rise of the Guardians, or Tangled! end/AN/

"She just won't listen to me!" Merida threw herself back against the tree trunk, which her hair stuck to a little, holding an apple but not biting it. She was too busy talking, her Scottish burr making each word inherently musical and fascinating.

Rapunzel patted her shoulder, shoving one hand into her paint-spattered overalls. "I'm sorry about your mom." She couldn't comprehend having such disagreements with her mother every day; her mother just told her what she needed, what to do, then she did it. The last thing she had ever argued with her mother about was going to a normal high school, instead of being homeschooled.

A breeze whipped the smell of wet grass around their noses, and Merida let out a groan. "She's just- you know, she never stops to think that maybe I don't want to learn how to play the flute, or that I might want a life outside of going to \_her\_ college! What kind of park ranger goes to \_college\_?"

Rapunzel nodded, not at all sure if park rangers went to college. She let out a sigh, adding, "I think it's so cool that you want to work in a forest; that sounds like a lot of fun."

Merida snorted, rolling her eyes. "\_You won't make enough money\_!" she imitated, sticking her chin up and making a prissy face. "\_Why won't you just become a scientist and earn enough for retirement?\_ She doesn't understand me at all! I don't need to be rich, I just want to be outside, in nature!"

Rapunzel laid against the grass, inhaling the smell and feeling the sun break through the boughs above them and gently warm her face. "Mhm. I mean, so long as you're happy, right?"

"Right! It shouldn't matter to her what I do as long as I'm happy!" Merida tucked her legs against her, her big shorts crinkling. "And you should have heard her yesterday! \_Don't wear a t-shirt and those baggy shorts, you look like a boy\_! As if anyone with my hair could look like a boy!"

Laughing, Rapunzel turned over, saying, "You've got the craziest hair I've ever seen."

"You're one to talk, Miss Hair-Down-to-the-Ankles. How you keep it so smooth and pretty, I'll never know," Merida retorted, a grin on her face. She reached out to grab the tail of Rapunzel's long braid, playing with it.

Rapunzel let out a giggle. "It grows faster than anyone else's; why not keep it as long as it can go? Besides, my mom loves my hair. I wouldn't cut it unless she said to."

"You've got to cut the apron strings," Merida commented, setting down the braid and grabbing her lunch box. "They'll be wanting us back inside soon. I hope you ate all your food?"

Rapunzel had had a problem finishing food on time the first semester; she wasn't used to having to rush, and she felt like she was going to choke, shoveling it all in like some of the other students did. But now, she'd finally caught up, and could eat as fast as Merida. "Yes, of course. Don't treat me like a baby." She poked Merida in the shoulder, getting up with a laugh.

And they walked into the busy school building, which had far too few windows to see outside, and every light had the sterile impression of a hospital about it, especially with the white walls and floors. It would be another day stuck inside, and both girls dreamed of a day when they wouldn't be stuck at the institution.

\* \* \*

><p>Jack looked out from under his hood, watching the other kids mill about the lunchroom. He bit off a piece of his fudgesicle (he didn't get brain freeze), mulling over what lives the people had. Anything had to be more interesting than talking to no one.</p>

He wasn't bitter; really, he wasn't. It was just that, he had been in this school system all his life, and the last time he'd had a friend had been in early middle school. It was as if he was invisible; no one seemed to look at him, not even the people he shared a lunch table with. Who, coincidentally, had bunched around the other end of the table, talking to each other in obnoxious, self-absorbed voices.

He'd dyed his hair; it was bleach blonde, just to see if anyone would notice. Not even the punks had noticed him, or the hipsters; he supposed the flip-flops he chronically wore sort of distracted from his potential coolness.

All in all, he was feeling kind of sorry for himself today. Was it so much to ask for direction? Just a friendly push in the right way? His father was no help, practically nonexistent in his life; a Jericho Frost, from whom he'd gotten his last name and not much else. His mother worked two jobs to keep them in a good place financially. He buried his face in his hands, thinking that if no one talked to him again today, he might do something drasticâ€|

"Um, hi, can I sit here?"

Jack looked up. In front of him stood an awkward, uncomfortable brown-haired boy; on his tray was an apple, a milk, and two sandwiches. A healthy lunch. Under his arm, barely held up by the awkward tuck, was a thick book.

"Is it okay? I mean, if it's not, I can find somewhere elseâ€|"

"No, no, it's fine. You can sit right there." Jack gestured across from him, and, suddenly remembering manners, stated, "I'm Jack."

"I'm Hiccup." Instantly, Hiccup seemed to assume that his name was going to be laughed at, because he said, with a groan, "It was my mom's idea. She was sort into Norse religion or something; she said a name like that would confuse the evil creatures, or something. Personally, I think she just used it as an excuse because she thought it was cute."

"Oh. Okay." Jack wasn't at all bothered by the strange name, of course, but if Hiccup wanted to carry on about it, that was his business. "So, how come you're sitting here? Don't you have somewhere else you usually sit?"

"Wellâ€|" Hiccup looked a bit unsure, scratching the back of his neck as he sat, "I'm a boxer. A very, very bad one; it's my dad's thing, he justâ€| well, he is a boxer, so he wants me to be a boxer, andâ€| anyway, my boxer 'friends' made me leave the table for doing so badly at a match yesterday. So, yeah, I'm kind of a loser."

Jack shrugged. "Well, you can sit there as long as you want." He eyed the book, asking, "What's the book about?"

"Oh, this?" Hiccup lifted the book, sheepishly saying, "It'sâ€| it's about pitbulls. You know, the dog. I justâ€| I saw one around, and the other boxers have been throwing things at it and stuff. I thought maybe if I understood it, wellâ€| It's stupid, but I thought maybe I could make it go away instead of having to scare it away every time."

"Pitbull? Good luck with that. They're vicious," Jack commented, cracking his knuckles after throwing the last bit of fudgesicle in his mouth. Then he smiled. "But hey, got to give you points for trying. You've probably got more guts than the rest of them."

"Yeah." Hiccup was quiet, digging into his lunch. "So, how come you sit alone here?"

Jack shrugged, saying, "No one's sat with me before. Simple as that." Was it really that weird that no one had noticed him before now? He briefly wondered if Hiccup was here for some prank, but dismissed that as silly. Why would someone prank him?

They sat in relative silence, occasionally offering questions to the other, as Hiccup wolfed down his lunch.

Jack learned a few things about Hiccup: he was an only child, just like him. He also seemed to have a passion for learning, occasionally reading aloud from the book while they sat there. He managed to make it sound interesting, like pitbull breeding was something that Jack would want to get into all of a sudden.

Jack was actually very disappointed when the bell rang; he gave Hiccup a quick salute, and said, "See you!"

"See you tomorrow!" Hiccup said, and then he scurried off.

Jack stared after him. Huh, had he made a friend? Probably too soon to call him a friend. Still, he wanted to see where it wentâ€!

/AN/ I just had to write a Big Four/Rise of the Brave Tangled Dragons fic. I might keep this just a oneshot, though it was very fun to writeâ€| Hope you enjoyed it.

## 2. Chapter 2

I don't own Rise of the Guardians, Tangled, Brave, or How to Train Your Dragon. End/AN/

Ah, the bus.

Merida could still remember the day that Rapunzel had referred to it as 'the big yellow monster that eats kids.' She'd had to clarify she was joking in the next moment, that it was what she'd called it when she was little and homeschooled.

It smelled like sweat and gasoline in the bus, like a space with too many boys crammed into it. She clicked her tongue, sitting in her seat with her backpack on the floor, and Rapunzel crammed in next to her. "I hate boys. They're so smelly."

Rapunzel cracked a grin, saying, "I think some of them are nice."

Of course Rapunzel would say that. She didn't seem to think bad people existed, much less purely obnoxious ones. "Well, I may not be big on 'personal hygiene', but those slobs take it too far!"

Oops. That sounded like she didn't even take a shower! Merida backtracked, adding, "I mean, I shower and all, but I don't go slathering my face with makeup and drowning myself in perfume!"

"I knew what you meant," Rapunzel assured her. Her face was absent of makeup too, though she always seemed to have this glow that made

Merida wonder if she wore just a little bit.

"You're too sweet for your own good, Rapunzel," Merida sighed. Rapunzel had sat with the druggies and delinquents for the first six months of school; apparently, she had been unharmed by the experience, because she still greeted any one of them in the hallway if she happened to run into them.

"I don't think there's such a thing. That's like saying there are too many puppies," Rapunzel said, grinning still. Ah yes, no end to the sweetness with Rapunzel.

Merida couldn't help but grin back; Rapunzel's happiness was infectious. "Do you want to come over to my house after school? We can go out in the woods and catch some frogs. There're lots of em around the pond."

Rapunzel's face went from cheerfully grinning to somehow cheerfully looking hesitant and abashed. "I'm sorry, you know I wish I could; my mom wants me to come straight home after school. You know that."

And Merida did know that. It didn't stop her from asking every time, though. "Ah, forget your mom! She should let you do what you want!"

"Merida, I love my mom, and I don't want to hurt her," Rapunzel said, with a touch of firmness in her voice; it was almost as though she were correcting Merida, though with the gentleness of handing an egg. "If she wants me to stay home, then I will."

Merida crossed her arms. "Yeah, I know you will. Just... just for once, she can't get mad at you for just one time coming over to my house!"

She'd been dying to have Rapunzel over. Her own mom had already approved it, though she did question whether or not Rapunzel was an appropriate friend for Merida. The first visit would have been an appraisal by her mother, but Rapunzel was so sweet and nice, Merida was sure she would pass with flying colors.

Not that it was ever going to happen.

The bus came to a stop, and Rapunzel rushed out, calling behind her, "Bye, see you tomorrow!"

"Yeah, see you tomorrow!"

\* \* \*

><p>Hiccup hadn't caught the bus that day. Instead, he was with the boxers, practicing. They practiced outside at this point, on flesh-colored, muscular dummies that felt like rubber.</p>

When it was colder, they would go inside, but for now, the chain link fence surrounded their practice area.

Right then, they were in the midst of doing pushups, about 25, though each person was at varying levels of completion.

Hiccup was straining already, up to ten. He was stronger than the

average kid, but not stronger the average boxer; he could see Astrid pumping up and down like she was machine.

"Come on, Hiccup, even the girls are beating you!" Snotlout huffed, pink and sweaty.

Fun thing about the boxers: the 'guys' gave each other nicknames, if you were 'in.' Snotlout, Fishlegs, Tuffnut, even Ruffnut... Who was technically a girl, but only technically.

Everyone had one but Hiccup.

"What do you mean 'even'?" It came out between gritted teeth, but it was a lot more even than Snotlout's grasping breaths. Astrid, the only one who also didn't have a nickname.

"Oh, hey, you know, I just meant, girls and upper body strength, you know..." Snotlout tried to dig himself out of the hole, but he only succeeded in making that determined glow on Astrid's face seem more angry.

Astrid didn't have a nickname either, but it wasn't because she sucked at boxing. It was because she was way too cool for it.

She threw herself up on her feet, crossing her arms and looking at Gobber, who was their coach. "Sit-ups next, coach?"

Hiccup gritted his teeth, biting back a groan as he went into his thirteenth pushup.

Gobber looked at a paper on a clipboard; chances were, there was actually nothing on the clipboard, or it was notes from something else entirely; all the kids knew that Gobber made up whatever they did on the spot more times than not.

"Eh, running suicide; get some water, wait for the others," Gobber said, gesturing with his prosthetic hand towards a big orange water cooler.

As Astrid disappeared, and the others were finishing up their pushups, Hiccup could hear Gobber's footsteps coming his way.

\_No, no,\_ he thought, \_just give me a few more minutes, I'll be done\_. He clenched his eyes shut, focusing on going down and pushing up even though it was burning his body. Maybe if he just tried harder, if he just wished for Gobber not to come this way...

"Hiccup, how many pushups have you done?" Gobber stood over him, his coach face on.

"Uh, some," Hiccup managed, trying to get the pushups done but also done well before he was forced to give a number.

"Hiccup. Have you been doing your exercises at home? I gave you all handouts!" Gobber seemed to raise his eyes heavenwards.

"Yeah, and everyone did them but Haddock!" Snotlout was more than nice enough to announce this to everyone. Ruffnut and Tuffnut broke out into loud, obnoxious laughter, while Fishlegs tittered along

nervously.

Gobber liked Hiccup; he was a friend of his father's, and had known Hiccup as a child.

However, Gobber also didn't show favorites when he was in coach mode. He let out a sigh, crossing his arms. "Hiccup, this isn't cheerleading! You've got to take your boxing seriously!"

A bit of a lump seemed to form in the back of Hiccup's throat. He did do the exercises; he did everything he could think of to be good at his father's favorite sport.

His father had gone to state as a teenager, only a little older than him. He'd won competitions and been the best boxer his school (this school) had to offer.

And Hiccup just didn't measure up.

"Yes, coach," he forced out, pushing up once again.

Gobber gave something of a harrumph, his facial hair twitching, and he said, "Finish up there and join the rest of them running suicide after."

Their shoes already pounded on the ground, Astrid in the lead; as Gobber turned back to the rest of them, Hiccup gritted his teeth, fighting back the stinging in his eyes. The last thing he needed was to feel like a failure in front of them.

Even if he thought he already was one.

\* \* \*

><p>If there was something Jack could claim as a talent, it was observing people without being seen. He sometimes joked to himself that he had a superpower: he was the great invisible man.</p>

Right now, he was watching the boxers outside- and more specifically, Hiccup.

All right, maybe it wasn't exactly normal to spy on his only potential friend, but he'd gotten sort of nervous, anxious... it wasn't as though Hiccup would see him anyway.

There were a few things he'd concluded about Hiccup.

One, he was not really all that suited to be a boxer. He didn't react in time, he didn't block well, and he just generally looked miserable.

Two, he was right about the other boxers. They seemed to treat him as not-quite-in-the-group; he was Hiccup and they were the team.

Three, Hiccup might be nearly as lonely as he was. As he left the training area, his head hung a bit, and he didn't talk to anyone.

The weird thing was, he was looking around, as if he'd expected someone or something to be there.

Jack had left before Hiccup had come his way, hidden in the bushes.

/AN/ I hope y'all like the update. It was a long time coming, I know. I can't wait to get into the juicier bits, but it's still very much a work in progress!

Thanks for reading!

### 3. Chapter 3

I don't own Tangled, Brave, Rise of the Guardians, or How to Train Your Dragon! End/AN/

"Mum! I'm home!" Merida tossed her backpack onto the end table by the door, letting out a sigh and popping her back. As she walked towards the kitchen, she heard her mum's voice echo from the laundry room,

"Merida, don't get into the chips; eat something healthy for snack."

"Yes, Mum," Merida said, getting into the fridge and looking for something. An apple would do nicely; she chomped into it, and nearly slammed into her mum as she turned to leave the kitchen.

"Merida! Ladies don't chomp apples like horses. Close your lips around it," her mum said, laundry basket heaped with clothes on her hip. Colorful pj's marked it as the children's laundry, as well as the utter lack of girly clothes. That was Merida's mum's department.

Well, more 'womanly' than 'girly', but still.

Merida groaned, but said, "Yes Mum." How one was supposed to eat an apple quietly, she wasn't sure, but she did her best at it.

"How was school today?" Her mum put the laundry basket on the counter, standing still as if planning on standing there for a while. Her neat green sweater went nicely with her brown pants, matching her green earrings and the silver bracelet around her wrist, as if she had carefully coordinated the outfit in advance. She probably had.

"Oh, you know, some of this, some of that," Merida said, and her mother winced as she took another bite of the apple.

"Merida, don't be vague." Her mum began to sort through the clothes, as if looking for something in particular.

"I hung out with Punzy at lunch, I got an A on my Biology quiz, and I went to the bathroom at least three times," Merida said, rolling her eyes.

"Ladies don't roll their eyes, Merida. Don't give me that attitude," her mother said, but she didn't seem particularly forceful with it. She fished \_something\_ out of the basket, something fairy blue and embroidered.

"Mum, what's that?" Merida stopped mid-bite, eyeing the thing like it was a mutant with three heads. If it was supposed to go on \_her\_, then there was going to be a problem.

"This is for you. I saw it on sale at the store, and I thought it would look nice on you," Merida's mum said, holding it up. It was worse in full, unobstructed view, the embroidery all in flowers around the edges, puff princess sleeves, and a clearly fitted look to it.

"Mum, you can't be serious!" Merida said, burying a hand in her hair. She would have run it through, but her hair didn't often allow that.

"I'm not trying to make you wear it on a day-to-day basis, Merida, so you don't need to act like I'm torturing you. This is for the dinner with your father's boss and co-workers; you shouldn't look like a ruffian for a nice occasion." Her mum turned the dress a bit, a fond expression on her face, like the dress was a friend who'd agreed to make Merida do what she wanted.

Merida groaned, but the look from her mother shushed any protests.

"Besides," she said, "This dinner is very important. Your father's boss helps decide a big scholarship for science majors; a good impression won't hurt, will it?"

"I don't want to go to college," Merida grumbled. When would her mother figure out that all she wanted to do was almost live outside? Free, with fresh air and no stuffy offices or classrooms.

"You are going to college, and that's final," Her mother said, voice a bit more fierce than usual. She seemed to calm herself, adding, "You'll thank me later. You can't just skip college, Merida."

"Yes, Mum," Merida said, heading out of the kitchen. Her every plan centered on skipping college, but she didn't need to tell her mum that again.

"Merida! Pick up your backpack and put your things away! A lady doesn't leave a mess."

Merida stalked back into the room, and got her backpack. "Yes, Mum."

She couldn't wait to move out.

\* \* \*

><p>"Mother! Mother, you'll never believe how things went in art class today," Rapunzel bubbled over, throwing her book bag on the couch and twirling around.</p>

"Yes, dear?" Her mother looked up from the computer, where she was typing out a document. A coffee cup sat next to her, with a bunch of roses in the shape of a heart on it.

"I finished my project, you know, the picture of the dancing fairy,

and the teacher said it was \_almost perfect\_!" She beamed, her arms behind her back.

"That's wonderful, dear!" her mother said, looking over from her work with a slightly tired smile. "Come here, sweetheart."

Rapunzel hopped over, sitting down next to her mother's desk chair. Her mother began to stroke her head, running her hands through her hair; Rapunzel untied her hair so that her mother's hands could move more freely.

"I'm so glad you're doing so well at school; I was worried that the separation would bother you." Her mother's hands felt wonderful going through her smooth hair.

"I told you I could do it!" Rapunzel beamed again, cross-legged and tipping her head back to look at her mother.

"Yes, I know, sweetheart," her mother replied, still stroking her head like she was some pet, "I just worry about you. It's been different without you home."

"I know, but I've been learning so many things about \_everything\_!" Rapunzel said, not mentioning the things she learned that her mother probably wouldn't be so glad about her knowing.

"I know, dear." Her mother's hands left her hair, and she kissed the top of her head. "You know you're my everything, don't you, tater tot?"

"And you're mine," Rapunzel replied, used to this conversation.

"I love you," her mother said.

"I love you more," Rapunzel grinned.

"I love you most."

\* \* \*

><p>Hiccup had gone home after boxing practice.</p>

It was an empty place, big enough for three but only filled with two. It was also fairly cluttered, full of manly things, and with a boxing dummy sitting in the garage. He was expected to practice with it every day, and he did, but today he passed it by.

He slumped heavily into the seat by the table in the kitchen, letting out a sigh. He pulled his chemistry book out of his backpack, flipping it open to the current chapter and getting out a highlighter.

His father wouldn't be home for the next couple hours.

\* \* \*

><p>Jack had hiked back home, entering the empty apartment with his key. His mother had drilled into him the importance of always having the key, because she often wasn't home, and she didn't want him to be hungry or some such.</p>

She'd often commented that he looked almost homeless, with his hoody that he wore everyday, the old flip-flops he stuck to even when it was cold, and the pants that exposed his ankles, but it was in the concerned, loving way that he was used to.

He would never tell her, but he didn't want her to spend money on him. He had basically what he needed, and he knew money was tight.

So, as he got inside, and threw himself down on the couch, and rubbed at his cold toes.

The rumbling laugh of his next door neighbor, a man known as North, came through the walls, and he wondered if they were having another get together for their level of the apartment building.

His mother and he were never invited; they'd never gotten to socialize with his mother, and he was just a teenage boy and easy to overlook.

He walked over to the fridge, and looked for yesterday's mac'n'cheese.

It was a quick heat-up job, and a flurry of raucous laughter continued to come through the walls.

Then there was a knock at the door; Jack flip-flopped over, and peered through the peephole.

It was the Australian neighbor, Bunnymund. For someone with such a weird name, he certainly acted like he was a bigshot.

Jack swung open the door, grinning. "Yeah?"

"Stop putting my door decorations on the floor," Bunnymund snapped. He was tall, with evidence of muscles and the look of an outdoorsman.

Jack raised his eyebrows, saying, "What makes you think it's me?"

This is was some of the only fun he ever had. Bunnymund would put up some cutesy decorations on his door, and Jack would take them down. It was like a private game, something that gave him a thing to do while he nursed his loneliness.

"Who else could it be? There are no other kids in this apartment building!" Bunnymund looked very irritable.

"Mhm, well, maybe North has decided he doesn't like you...?" Jack couldn't keep the mischievous sparkle out of his eyes, and Bunnymund could see that.

"I'm going to talk to your mum one of these days," he grumbled.

"If you can catch her," Jack said, knowing this was a familiar threat. He raised an eyebrow, saying, "Is that all?"

Bunnymund shook his head, murmuring something about someone deserving

a spanking. "Don't. Touch. Them."

"Got it," Jack said with a grin.

Bunnymund left then.

Those decorations were going down first thing in the morning, Jack thought to himself.

/AN/ Gah, I hope it's okay. I've been inspired to continue work on this story; it's just a matter of unknotting all the plots, I guess.

Hope y'all liked it! Expect more!

End  
file.